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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the creation of a faculty development program in Valencia Community College's Osceola Campus called Faculty to Faculty Connection. Part-time faculty makes up 48-55% of classes taught depending on the discipline, which is higher than the College's full time to part time ratio. The program's purpose is to address two concerns expressed by part-time faculty: (1) part-time faculty reported a sense of disassociation or anomie in terms of their relationship with institution; and (2) part-time faculty also felt that they needed a better "tool kit" to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. The Faculty to Faculty Connection program attempts to alleviate some of the problems faced by the part-time faculty by allowing professors to meet with colleagues and discuss important issues regarding their relationship to the institution as well as how faculty can improve student learning. The program grew considerably in size during its first year; attesting to the positive reviews that were being passed around by word of mouth. The program was evaluated after the first year by the faculty and it received very favorable reviews. These reviews will be taken into account as the program moves into its second year. (MZ)

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ED 481 534

It's a Small World After All
Creating Magic in Faculty Development

by

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Abstract

Valencia Community College's Osceola Campus created the *Faculty to Faculty Connection* as faculty development program designed to address two needs. Part-time faculty reported a sense of disassociation or *anomie* in terms of their relationship with the institution. They also felt the need to have a better "tool kit" to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Valencia's part-time faculty are looking for concrete strategies to translate theory into action. The *Faculty to Faculty Connection* is providing access to those strategies and building a greater sense of academic community.

The *Faculty to Faculty Connection* is a product of institutional context, thorough needs assessment, careful management and execution, and evaluation.

Institutional Context:

Valencia Community College is a public two-year post-secondary institution, one of 28 public community colleges in Florida. The college is a multi-campus college with four campuses. The college offers credit classes leading to the Associate of Arts, the Associate in Applied Science, and Associate in Science degrees. The college primarily serves residents in Orange and Osceola counties, however, a significant number of other in-state, out-of-state, and international students attend the college. Altogether, approximately 55,000 students attend the college annually. The Osceola Campus serves just over 10% of these students. During the fall term of the 2002-2003 academic year, Valencia's Osceola Campus employed 44 full-time faculty and approximately 80 part-time faculty. Depending on the discipline, 48-55% of classes are taught by part-time faculty. This number is higher than the college's average full-time to part-time ratio.

Valencia is working hard to become a learning-centered institution. We have identified the ability to think, value, communicate and act as the critical competencies of a Valencia graduate. As we go about our business, we are constantly exhorted to be able to know and prove what our students are learning. This has created an exciting, if potentially confusing, intellectual climate of change. Many of our faculty are anxious to learn about specific strategies that can help move them from an acceptance of the ideal to the implementation of the real.

Needs Assessment:

Needs assessment was a critical first step. A cursory review of the literature reinforced the fact that many part-time faculty feel a real sense of disconnection and alienation from the colleges that rely on their services (Fulton, 2000, p. 6). Many part-time faculty are also excluded from faculty development opportunities by deliberate policy, benign neglect, or insensitive scheduling. In addition, many faculty development programs are poorly received because part-time faculty do not find the content relevant or useful to their teaching needs (Murray, 2002, p.5). All too, often, faculty development is defined as being asked/paid to listen to a consultant from a remote location with little connection to faculty's experiences (Maxwell & Kazlaukas, 1992, pp. 356-357). The faculty development programs which receive the highest grades are usually the ones that cost the college the most – whether that be paying for conferences or funding paid workshops (Murray, p. 3) Part-time faculty are usually deemed ineligible for this level of investment. Overall, part-time and full-time faculty feel very little sense of ownership in most faculty development programs (Murray, Spring 2002, pp. 1-6).

The part-time faculty on Valencia's Osceola Campus shared most of these concerns. These concerns were highlighted when the campus's Provost, Dr. Silvia Zapico, invited every part-time faculty member to her office for an informal conversation. Approximately half of our part time faculty responded to this invitation and relayed a mix of good and bad news. Our part-time faculty did feel that they had good administrative support. In fact, they evinced no desire to see any more of their academic deans. They also, however, felt like they were spinning out in space with no umbilical cord linking them to the mother ship. They had no real connection to

other teachers in their disciplines, and they were starved for conversation and feedback with and from their peers.

Bearing this in mind, Dr. Zapico went before the collegewide budget committee to secure funding, and asked her administrative team to design a program that would address this problem. The first step was to create a task force with representation from full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and administration. This task force was given a budget of $17,000. Before the task force started spending money, a critical step was to ask all faculty what kind of faculty development program they wanted. A survey was developed and distributed to every faculty member on campus. Three themes emerged and are summarized below:

- While full-time faculty wanted activities to be scheduled during the working day, part-time faculty overwhelmingly voted for Saturday mornings and/or Friday evenings.
- There was a very marked preference for "hands-on" activities. Our faculty felt that they had been exposed to learning-centered theory, but weren't always sure about learning-centered practice.
- Faculty were very anxious to spend some time connecting to one another in a relatively unstructured environment.

Designing & Running the Program:

With this input in mind, the task force set developing a program that would meet faculty needs. We set up four sessions of three hours each. Two of these were scheduled on Saturday

morning, and two of them were scheduled on Friday evening. All meetings were conducted during the spring semester. Other features of the program were as follows:

- ✓ All participants were paid at a rate of $75 per session (three hours).
- ✓ Discipline "colloquies" were scheduled at each session. These were led by a full-time faculty member in each major discipline, and were designed to promote a free exchange of ideas rather than a flow of information.
- ✓ Faculty (including part-time faculty) working on our campus designed and produced all the workshops.
- ✓ Workshops were designed to be as practical as possible. Topics included:
    - o How to Write a Syllabus to Keep Your Out of Trouble
    - o How to Create a Web-site to Support Your Class
    - o How to Recognize & Deal With Second Language Interference
    - o Competency-based Course Design
- ✓ Food was served at all sessions, and time was built in for informal interaction.
- ✓ A web-site and discussion area provided an alternative venue for interaction.
- ✓ Lead faculty in critical curriculum areas were paid stipends to help coordinate the program. They were particularly charged with contacting part-time faculty to discern their needs and concerns.
- ✓ Communication, recruitment, and evaluation were facilitated by building an e-mail directory of all potential participants.

This program was well attended. Over forty faculty members attended each session. Approximately two thirds of these were part-time faculty. By the end of the spring semester, we were reduced to raiding other budgets because the demand for the program had outstripped our expectations. By the end of the semester, over sixty faculty had attended at least one session. To put this another way, over 50% of Osceola campus participated in at least one *Faculty to Faculty Connection* event.

Evaluation:

This program was evaluated using a simple "Plus, Minus, Interesting" (PMI) instrument. After each session, each participant was asked to comment on what had worked particularly well (plus), what needed improvement (minus), and what proved to be most thought-provoking (interest). At the end of the semester, each participant was asked to evaluate the program as a whole using the same instrument.

Participants' comments were extremely favorable. Overwhelmingly, participants reported that the opportunity to meet with their colleagues was both useful and enjoyable. The majority of the workshops were very positively received, although we did have some problems with scheduling and being too over-ambitious in scope.

The PMI evaluation does not lend itself to much statistical analysis, but the evaluations were very favorable. This impression was strengthened by the fact that each session attracted more participants – word of mouth may be an even more imprecise mode of evaluation, but it is powerful. As we embark on the second stage of this program, it will be important to create some sort of evaluation of how participants change what they do in their classrooms.

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